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THE HORNED HORSE
IN THE COINAGE
OF SELEUCUS I Nicator
THE ICONOGRAPHY OF POWER*

Abstract: The motif of the horned horse on the coins of Seleucus I is characteristic for the coinage of the first Seleucid king. Its meaning is still unclear in spite of many attempts to interpret it. The horned horse is associated with Dionysos, or Alexander the Great. Most of the coins featuring this motif were minted in the Iranian part of the empire of Seleucus I and this fact suggests that it should be interpreted in the context of Iranian culture in which a horse featured significantly and could symbolize royal power and authority. Horns as an iconographic element were characteristic of Babylon and were typical attributes of gods and kings in their representations. This publication focuses on the interpretation of the motif of the horned horse and horseman within the context of the Iranian religion and Achaemenid royal tradition and its influence on Seleucus' ideology of power.

Keywords: Seleucid coinage; Hellenistic period; ancient Iran; royal ideology; horned horse

Seleucus I Nicator (311-281 BC) created the greatest Hellenistic kingdom. His spectacular success was due both to his military talents, and his skill of gaining the support of the local population. This was highly significant due to important given the multiethnic and multicultural nature

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of his state.¹ Images of a horned horse and horned rider were, among other motifs, also present in this king's minting. The purpose of this article is to attempt to explain the significance of these images in the context of the propaganda policy and monarchical concepts of Seleucus I.

The silver obol depicting half of a horned horse forepart on the obverse and an anchor on the reverse comes from an unknown mint in the eastern Seleucid Empire (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 474, add. 16). The absence of an inscription with a royal title suggests that the coin was minted before 305 BC (Nefedov 2011, 19). The bronze coins with the images of the horned horse head and with the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ on the reverse are known from Seleucia on the Tigris (Fig. 1) (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 64-65, cat. no. 145-146) and the Bactrian mint (Uncertain Mint 19) (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 101, cat. no. 267-268). The royal title indicates that the coins were issued after the coronation of Seleucus, thus no earlier than 305-304 BC. The half of the horned horse and the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ are on the reverse of the bronze coin from Mint 19 at Gyaur Kala (ancient Merv), with a male figure's head in a tall pilos type hat on the obverse (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 474, add. 18).

The image of a horned horse is known from several coins: drachm (Newell 1938, No. 481, Pl. XXXVI, 9), hemidrachm (Newell 1938, No. 482, Pl. XXXVI, 10), and tetradrachm (Houghton and Stewart 1999, Pl. P.5.1, 1A; Houghton and Lorber 2002, cat. no. 203) minted in Ecbatana around 295-293 BC (Houghton and Stewart 1999, 27; Houghton and Lorber 2002, 81; Kritz 1997, 85; Marest-Caffey 2016, 19-20, Fig. 8; Newell 1938, 188-189). The obverse of these coins depicts the head of a young Heracles covered with a lion scalp. The reverse shows a horned rider on a horned horse and the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ. The rider is depicted in an Attic helmet decorated with bull horns and a different animal's ears, wearing a long sleeved chiton, a chlamys and trousers, and holding a spear in his right hand. The horse's head is decorated with bull horns, similar to those on the helmet, and bull, lion or panther hide is under the saddle, which

¹ The policies of Seleucus I towards the Asian population are best known from the example of Babylon, whose inhabitants enthusiastically greeted the Macedonian when he returned to the city in 312 BC (Diod. 19.91.1-2). Babylonian documents describe Seleucus as a legitimate ruler, fulfilling the cult duties required by the Babylonian kings and respectfully referencing local traditions (Anagnostou-Laoutides 2017, 149-156; Plischke 2014, 170). Despite the lack of analogous sources, similar gestures should be assumed to have occurred towards the Iranians (Primo 2009, 22). Seleucus possibly modeled himself on Alexander the Great, who on the one hand, respected Babylonian customs and on the other hand, referred to Achaemenid monarchical traditions (Olbrycht 2004, 22, 26-55, 286-307).

is finished with a clearly visible tail (Fig. 2). The coins from Ecbatana have been connected to Seleucus' conquest of the Sicilian estates of Demetrios Poliorcetes in 295 BC (Newell 1938, 189; Lund 1992, 91), or the conquest of the East (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 81, cat. no. 203). According to another interpretation, the horned rider is a reference to the flight of Seleucus from Babylon and his return to the city, and the horned horse commemorates the steed he was mounted on accompanying him (Hoover 1996, 50, note 27; Dahmen 2007, 104, note 8; Erickson 2013, 123-124; Plischke 2014, 169; Ogden 2017, 87). No sources confirm this hypothesis, however. Ioannes Malalas described a monument of a horse's head and a helmet around Antiochia that commemorates this event (Mal. *Chron.* 202. 17-19), but since there is no mention of the horns, this does not allow for the direct establishment of a link between this specimen and the Ecbatana coins (Miller and Walters 2004, 51; Ogden 2017, 85-87).

The horned horse head with the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ is seen on the reverse of the bronze coin from Apamea on the Orontes minted c. 300-281 BC while an elephant is depicted on the obverse. The images on this coin undoubtedly allude to the role of the cavalry and elephants in the Seleucus I's army (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 25, cat. no. 35; Iossif and Lorber 2010, 148, Fig. 9, Newell 1941, 156-157, No. 1128, Pl. XXXVI, 10).

The horned horse head is on the obverse of the bronze coin minted in Carrhae c. 295 with the image of a bull and the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ on the reverse (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 29, cat. no. 47; Iossif 2012, Fig. 2). The bull is shown just before the sacrifice. This image is interpreted as a symbol of the integration of new territories and a sign of the divine grace for the king's power and piety (Iossif 2012).

The horned horse head is present on the obverse of the silver tetradrachm from the mint in Pergamon minted by Philateiros in 281 BC following the killing of Seleucus I. The reverse is decorated with the image of an elephant and the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ. The coin was allegedly minted to commemorate the victory of Seleucus I at Corupedium in 281 BC (Fig. 3) (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 15, cat. no. 1-2). An example of an arrangement analogous both in the figural images and the inscription is present on the silver tetradrachm issued by an unknown mint, probably in Asia Minor (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 15, cat. no. 2).

The horned horse from Seleucus I's coins is identified as Bucephalus, and the horned horseman as Alexander the Great (Houghton and Stewart 1999; Mørkholm 2001, 73; Nefedov 2011, 20-21; Svenson 1995, 42). The images of a horseman identified with Alexander III similar to

the depictions on Seleucus I's coins from Ecbatana but without horns are known from the Argead king's coins: the silver staters (didrachms) from Hierapolis-Bambyke in Syria (Seyrig 1971, no. 8, Pl. 2; Olbrycht 2004, 304; 2014, 44) minted c. 333-325 BC (Dahmen 2007, 66, note 1) or after 330 BC (Olbrycht 2004, 304), and silver decadrachms (so-called Porus Medallions) minted after 326 BC (Holt 2003, 101-102, 118-125, Pl. 2-5; Olbrycht 2004, 299-300, note 129; 2011, Pl. 2.2; Dahmen 2007, 6-7, 109-110, Pl. 2.1-2).

Alexander the Great is also identified as the male head in an Attic helmet decorated with panther print, a bull horn, and an animal ear on the obverse of Seleucus I's coins (tetradrachms, drachms, hemidrachms and obols) minted in Susa (Fig. 4) (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 71-73, cat. no. 173-175; Erickson 2013, 120, Fig. 5; Thonemann 2015, 22, Fig. 1.25; Potts 2016, 351, Pl. 10.2; Anagnostou-Laoutides 2017, 155, Fig. 4.1). The helmet's decoration clearly refers to the horned horseman from the coins of Ecbatana and suggests that in both cases, the same man is depicted. These coins have been claimed to commemorate the battle of Ipsos in 301 BC (Mørkholm 2001, 72; Iossif 2004, 255-259, Fig. 1-3; 2012; Iossif and Lorber 2010, 157, Fig. 15; Marest-Caffey 2016, 2, 22-23), the eastward expedition of Seleucus I and the war with Chandragupta in 305 or 304 BC (Houghton and Stewart 1999, 29), or the battles of Alexander the Great in India (Mielczarek 2006, 10-11).

The animal elements of the horned horseman's helmet decoration, such as the horns, may point to Dionysos. Horns as his attribute have been mentioned in Eurypides' hugely popular 5th century play, the *Bacchae*, which relates Dionysos' return from the East (Eur. *Bacch.* 100, 618, 921-923, 1018). The tradition of connecting Dionysos with the East continues to be strong until late antiquity, as Julius Firmicus Maternus writing in the 4th century AD confirms (Firm. Mat., *De err.* 6,1-5). This god traversed Asia from Lydia to Bactria (Eur. *Bacch.* 1.13-17). Alexander the Great later followed Dionysos' path for propaganda purposes during his return from the Indian campaign (Otto 1965, 198; Seaford 2006, 37). The depictions of the Macedonian king's head in a diadem, or an elephant scalp, with ram horns are known from the coins of Ptolemy I Soter (Fig. 5) (Mørkholm 2001, 63-64; Dahmen 2007, 42; Meeus 2009, 248), Lysimachus (Mørkholm 2001, 27; Dahmen 2007, 16-17; Thonemann 2015, 20-21, 34, 155, Fig. 1.23, 2.14, 8.17), Agathocles of Syracuse (Stewart 1993, 266-269; Dahmen 2007, 14, 116), and the double gold daric from Mihr Zakah (Afghanistan) (Hold 2003; Dahmen 2007, 9; Meeus 2009, 248; Olbrycht 2011, 21).

The man in a horned helmet identified with Dionysos or Alexander symbolizes the conqueror of Asia (Houghton and Stewart 1999, 27-28, 30-31; Mørkholm 2001, 73; Iossif and Lorber 2010, 159-160; Marest-Caffey 2016, 20). Seleucus' head in the diadem with bull horns was present in Seleucid minting, but reportedly only appeared following his death and formal deification (Hadley 1974, 12; Houghton and Stewart 1999, 28). The presence of Alexander the Great's likeness on the coins of Seleucus I aimed to legitimize his rule as the true successor to the Argead (Houghton and Stewart 1999, 32). These images showed Alexander as the patron of his victories (Nefedov 2011, 19) and referenced the title of the king of Asia and the divinity of the ruler (Mielczarek 2006, 10-11).

Even in the earliest attempts to identify him, the horned rider was identified as Seleucus I Nicator (Gardner 1878, xviii, 4; Babelon 1890, xv; Newell 1938). Like Alexander the Great, Seleucus fought in the East, which also allowed for a reference to Dionysos. The face of the man in the horned helmet from the Susa coins, which seems older than Alexander's face from Lysimachus' coins or those of Ptolemy I, suggests that a case could be made for the rider being Seleucus (Hoover 2002, 52). Seleucus would not have been an exception in placing his likeness on coins while still alive. Other Hellenistic rulers had done so before, including Ptolemy I (Dahmen 2007, 12; Mørkholm 2001, 65; Thonemann 2015, 19, Fig. 1.21-22), and Demetrius Poliorcetes, who actually appeared in a diadem with bull or goat horns (Fig. 6) (Mørkholm 2001, 78-79; Thonemann 2015, 21, Fig. 1.24) symbolizing the exaltation, or even deification, of the king (Kremydi 2011, 171). The horns themselves are linked to Poseidon (Kerényi 2015, 69; Kremydi 2011, 171; McInerney 2010, 117, 119 Fig. 5.2; Pollitt 2006, 32) or to Dionysos (Thonemann 2005, 82-84).

As he was the son of Zeus-Ammon, Alexander's helmet should have been decorated with ram horns as on the coins of Ptolemy or Lysimachus, not bull horns which appear on the coins of Seleucus I (Newell 1938, 189; Erickson 2019, 43). This discrepancy could result from the fact that bull horns would have indicated Alexander's connection to Dionysos, while ram horns were to indicate Zeus-Ammon (Nefedov 2011, 20-21, Ryc. 1.8), although in the Greek tradition, the ruler of Olympus was also associated with a bull (McInerney 2010, 112-116; Kerényi 2015, 71). Bull horns, however, are not known from any other depictions of Alexander the Great. There are also no sources connecting them to the Macedonian king.

In the case of Seleucus I, the motif of a bull's head (bucranium) appeared in his minting before the coin issues with a head in a horned

helmet and a horned rider: for example, coins minted in Susa around 311-295 BC (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 67-69 cat. no. 164), Carrhae c. 310-290 BC (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 27-28, cat. no. 40, 42), Heriapolis-Bambyce c. 298-294 BC (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 26-27, cat. no. 38), and Aï-Khanoum c. 285 BC (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 103, 105, cat. no. 283a). According to K. Erickson, the images of a bull's head from these coins are closely linked to the horned horse (Erickson 2019, 45). Sources (App. Syr. 56; 57. 294; AR 2.28; Lib. Orat. 11.92; Suda s.v. Σέλευκος) described statues of the king decorated with bull horns, which indicates an ancient tradition connecting the likenesses of Seleucus I Nicator with bull horns. In Iskenderun, Turkey, a monumental male head dating back to the second half of the 2nd century BC, originally part of a larger statue, was discovered. The monument, currently in the collection of the Antakya Museum, is now interpreted as an image of Seleucus I, which may confirm the authenticity of the ancient accounts of the king's statues with horns (Houghton 1986; Svenson 1995, 129-130; Erickson 2013, 121; 2019, 42, Fig. 1.5; Ogden 2017, 61-62).

The presence of trousers as part of the horned rider's clothing, which according to Diodorus Siculus were not adopted by the Macedonian conqueror (Diod. 17.77.5), can be used to unambiguously exclude Alexander the Great (Hoover 2002, 51-62; Erickson 2013, 122-123; 2019, 44). This allows for the final rejection of the horned horseman as the Macedonian king. In the case of the coins of Seleucus I, this would only have made sense if the horned horse was Bucephalus (Erickson 2013, 124; 2019, 45). The known minting of Seleucus I contains not only the horned horse but also horned elephants (Iossif and Lorber 2010, Fig. 1, 4-5, 7, 9-10), while horned animals were completely absent from Alexander's minting.

The horned helmet seen on Seleucus' coins minted in Susa and Ecbatana could have been a deliberate reference to both Dionysos and Alexander the Great as the first conquerors of Asia (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 71-73, 81; Iossif 2004; 2012). According to a different interpretation, however, the horned helmet indicated the new status of Seleucus I. It seems to have been his way of presenting himself as the ruler who should not be perceived relative to Alexander III and yet should be regarded as the Macedonian king's equal (Erickson 2019, 42). In the time of issuing the coins with the horned horseman, Seleucus, as the king and the most powerful Hellenistic ruler, did not need to associate himself with Alexander the Great. This, however, did not rule out his possible readiness to use certain elements of iconography related to Alexander the Great. The presence of trousers (*anaxyrides*)

can indeed indicate that Seleucus tried to expressly distance himself from him, which could be the element of Seleucus I's policy towards the Iranian elites. J. Wolski (1984; 1999, 25-29) pointed out that the attitude of the Seleucids towards the Macedonian king was ambiguous and as their authority was gradually solidified they progressively distanced themselves from the legacy of Alexander the Great, especially in Iran. The bronze coins of Seleucus II from Seleucia on the Tigris reinforce the identification of the coins with the horned horseman as those of Seleucus I. On the obverse the king's horned, diademed, three-quarter facing bust is depicted and the reverse features a horseman spearing a fallen enemy. The issuing of these coins is connected with the king's victory over the Ptolemaic army in 245 BC (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 274-275, cat. No. 767-768). The presence of the horns and the image of the horseman can be the reference to the coins of Seleucus I with the horned horseman.

The connection of the horned horse with Seleucus I does not explain the meaning of this motif. Apart from the abovementioned remark concerning Seleucus' escape from Babylonia and his triumphant return to it, the horned horse is interpreted as his personal symbol (Miller and Walters 2004, 50-51; Erickson 2019, 41) or as the symbol of the Seleucid cavalry (Mørkholm 2001, 75-76; Iossif 2012). Most of the coins with this motif are directly connected to the commemoration of military victories, except for the bronze coin from Carrhai.

The motif of the horned horse, as the motif of half a horse, is probably known at its earliest to come from the eastern, Iranian part of the Seleucid Empire. Before it was introduced as a separate coin motif, the horned horse head was one of the mint marks on silver tetradrachms of the Alexandrine type featuring the head of young Heracles wearing a lion-scalp on the obverse, and with Zeus enthroned depicted on the reverse, which were minted in Susa – one of Achaemenid capitals – c. 311-305 BC (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 274-275, cat. No. 767-768). The place where those coins were minted and the fact that other coins of this type lack these marks may indicate the connection of this image with Iran.

Coins with a horned rider wielding a spear on a horned horse were minted in Ecbatana, the capital of Media, a state known for its exquisite Nisean horses, which were the most famous mounts of the ancient world (Schmitt 2002). Herodotus was the first of the western authors to write about lowland horses (Hdt. 3.106.2; 7.40. 2-4). Strabo mentioned Nisean horses in his description of Media, pointing out that they were used by Persian kings (Strab. 11.13.7; 11.14.9). Polybius noted the presence of Nisean horses

in the army of the Seleucid king Antioch IV (175-164 BC) (Plb. 30.25.6.). Steeds from this region were the pride of Iran during Sasanian times (Amm. 13.6.30).

The rider wears trousers, a garment typical for Iranians, who were famous for excellent cavalry (Shahbazi 1986, 1987; Head 1992, 31-39; Sekunda 1992, 6, 20-22, 54-57; Nefedkin 2006). This could have been a reference to the role of the Iranian cavalry in the army of Seleucus I in the battle of Ipsos in 301 BC (Olbrycht 2005, 232-233). The Iranian clothing of the rider could have been a gesture towards the Iranian aristocracy, whose support ensured peace in Iranian provinces (Olbrycht 2013, 169-171), enabling Seleucus to pursue an active and expansive policy in the west. The horned horse head from the coins minted later in the western part of the empire clearly reference the coins from Iranian provinces (Iossif 2012). In Babylon, Seleucus was able to work smoothly with the local elites and secure their loyalty (Holloway 2002, 226). There is no reason to believe he acted differently in Iran. Archaeological research has shown that the places of worship known from the ancient Persian period still functioned in Hellenistic times. Iranian holidays were observed and Iranian rituals were still practiced in the Seleucid army (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 75-76). The Seleucids also continued Achaemenid traditions with regard to the administrative structure, government system, and imperial ideology (Kosmin 2014b, 4).

According to ancient sources (Just. 1.10.5; Hdt. 1.189, 1.216, 7.113; Strab. 11.8.6, 11.14.9; Xen. *An.* 4.5.24; 4.5.35; *Cyr.* 8.3.24), the horse was culturally and religiously significant in Iran (Simons 1994, 170; Shahbazi 1987). The divine patron of horses was the goddess Drvāspā (Yt 9), a minor deity in the Zarathustrian pantheon (Boyce 1996, 82; Kellens 1996). Herodotus (Hdt. 7.40.4), Xenophon (Xen. *Cyr.* 8.3.12), and Curtius Rufus (Curt. *An.* 3.3.11) mention an empty chariot devoted to Zeus/Jupiter (who should be identified with Ahura Mazda (Boyce 1984)) that was pulled by white horses and accompanied an Achaemenid army, preceding the chariot of the Great King.

There are no images from the Achaemenid period that could undoubtedly be identified with the Ahura Mazda. Most often, he is identified with the man from the winged disc, but it is not unlikely that this is actually the personification of khvarenah, the royal glory. The first indisputable images of Ahura Mazda come only from rock reliefs of the Sasanian period and show the god and king while legitimizing the power of the kings of Iran.²

² The reliefs of Ardašir I (224-271 AD) in Firuzabad/Fir I, Naqš-e Rājab/NRa I depict Ahura Mazda in the costume of Iranian nobility. He is standing in front of the King and handing

This motif probably appeared only in the Parthian period (Shenkar 2014, 47-65). It cannot be ruled out, however, that it refers to an older tradition linking the horse with Ahura Mazda (Jacobs 1991, 56-57; Iossif 2012), noted by Herodotus (Hdt. 3.85-86). Avesta as a white-bodied horse was also described by Tishtrya (Yt. 8.18) and Verethraghna (Yt. 14.9). This supports the conclusion that a white horse could have represented different deities and it personified a divine presence.

Horns on a horse's head suggest its otherworldly nature. Horses with bull horns are not known from the Achaemenid iconography, but the motif of a bull's head was widespread, appearing on objects varying from small items, such as sigils or jewelry, to the protomes of monumental columns in royal palaces, which could have resulted from its role in the Iranian religion (Boyce 1990; Hoover 1996, 31-32; Root 2002, 192-198; Sathe 2012, Troncoso 2014, 61-63). Using the motif of a bull and bull horns in his coinage, Seleucus alluded to Iranian culture and religion (Erickson 2019, 42). In Yasht 14 Verethraghna, the yazata of victory is described as a beautiful bull with golden horns (Yt 14.7). A horse with bull horns and bull horns on the helmet of a horned rider could signify the support of Verethraghna or symbolize victory, being thematically linked to the depiction of the goddess Nike on Susa coins and the depiction of a mounted charge on the coins from Ecbatana.

In Mesopotamia, horns have often been an attribute of gods, fantastical creatures, and kings. From the times of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin (2254-2218 BCE), horns were also symbols of divinity of the rulers (Süring 1984, 328-330; Winter 2008, 76-78; Michalowski 2008, 34-42; Garrison 2011, 28; Kosmin 2014a, 181; Plischke 2014, 170). Depictions of naked heroes fighting wild animals while wearing bull horns and ears on their heads, as well as men in headgear with bull horns, are also seen in Mesopotamian art (Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 48-52). Even Marduk, the most important Babylonian god, had horns (Anagnostou-Laoutides 2012, 3-5; 2017, 155-156; Herring 2013, 154; Oshima 2014, 177-178). In Greece, horns were the attributes of Zeus (McInerney 2010, 112-116; Kerényi 2015, 71), Poseidon, and Dionysos (Svenson 1995, 40), but they were not typical for their depictions (Thonemann 2015, 155-156).

over a ring that symbolizes imperial power to him. In Naqš-e Rostam/NRu I, the Iranian deity and the King are shown on horseback (Luschey 1986). The mounted investiture scene was also depicted on the reliefs of Šapur I (241-272 AD) in Naqš-e Rostam/NRu II and Bišapur I, and Bahram I (271-274 AD) in Bišapur V (Herrmann and Curtis 2002).

The horned horse was not only the symbol of cavalry and military victory, but also of royal power and its divine legitimacy (Hoover 1996, 97; Troncoso 2014, 64). Bull's horns, then, could have symbolized Marduk's support for Seleucus as the legitimate king of Babylon (Hadley 1974, 58-59; Newell 1938, 38; Erickson 2009, 37-41; Kosmin 2014a, 181), while simultaneously showing him as a Mesopotamian hero-king (Erickson 2019, 42). However, it is also conceivable that after having been familiarized with Mesopotamian religious and monarchic ideas,³ Seleucus I began to strive for his own deification, which could have been indicated by the introduction of coins with the horned horse and the horned elephant, c. 295 BC (Iossif 2012).

According to Herodotus, Darius the Great had his horse to thank for the crown (Hdt. 3.85-86). Curtius Rufus described the dream of Darius III in which Alexander the Great rode into Babylon, signaling the downfall of the Achaemenid state (Curt. *Anab.* 3.3.3). In both cases, the horse seems to signify, or be linked to, royal rule. Like Marduk, Ahura Mazda was identified with Zeus (De Jong 1997, 251-263, Shenkar 2011, 129; 2014, 62).⁴ All three deities were patrons of kingship. According to M. Shenkar (2014, 50), Ahura Mazda was a patron of the Achaemenid dynasty from at least the times of Darius I. The Achaemenids ruled *vašnā Auramazdāha* (by the grace of Ahura Mazda) (DB I 11-12). Taking into account the above reports of the empty chariot of Ahura Mazda pulled by white horses, one may conclude that the horned horse could have symbolized this god's support for Seleucus and the binding nature of his rule.

The horned horse could have also represented Verethraghna, described by Avesta as the bull (Yt. 14.7) and the horse (Yt. 14.9); this could explain the bull horns on the horse's head. Verethraghna was not only the yazata

³ The Babylon King List, when it describes Seleucus' leaving Babylon as a result of the war with Antigonos, uses a language typical to Babylonian cosmology, thus embedding the conflict between the Diadochi in the myth of Marduk and Tiamat. During the akītu festival which took place after Seleucus' return to Babylon, he was identified, as a ruler, with Marduk, having been endowed with epithets typically used to describe this god. This indisputably intensified the cult of rulers, which was strong in the early Hellenistic period, and strengthened Seleucus' identification with Zeus (Kosmin 2018, 33).

⁴ In Persepolis, four tables dating back to the early Hellenic period were discovered, containing the Greek names of the Iranian gods Ahura Mazda (Zeus Megistos), Ahanita (Athena Basileia, Artemis), and Mithra (Apollo) (Boyce 1984; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 76; Iossif and Lorber 2009, 321; Olbrycht 2013, 174, 176, Fig. 6: 2016: 100). The identification of Ahura Mazda with Zeus is also clearly indicated by the inscription of Antioch I, King of Commagene at Nemrud Dağ, where a deity called Zeus-Oromazdes appears (Shenkar 2014, 61).

of victory, but also the wind-borne *hvarenō mazdadhātem* (the Glory made by [Ahura] Mazda) (Yt. 14.2). G. Gnoli (1974, 72-75) believes that the *vašnā Auramazdāha* formula contains the khvarenah concept, which does not occur literally in ancient Persian texts, as a divine legitimization of Persian kings.

The presence of the horned horse on the coins of Seleucus I was a symbol of victory and royal glory (av. *hvarena*, old pers. *khwarenah*), which was a sign of Ahura Mazda's support for Achaemenid kings and legitimized their rule (Finer 2003, 293). Interestingly, in the Hellenistic period, Verethraghna was associated with Heracles (De Jong 1997, 32-33, 302-304; 2003; Stančo 2012, 137-138), whose head is present on the obverse of the coins with the horned horseman on the horned horse from Ecbatana.

Most coins with the horned horse were minted in Iranian mints, and the horned horseman's clothing clearly references Iranian culture. This supports the idea of searching for his origin and meaning, ambiguous as it is, within the context of Iranian culture and religion. The horned horse could have indicated that Seleucus ruled *vašnā Auramazdāha*. Through such iconography, he presented himself as the next Great King. Thus, it could have been related to the adoption of certain elements of Iranian religious symbolism and monarchical ideology (Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 75) and also the Achaemenid titlature (Olbrycht 2013, 171). From the point of view of Seleucus, this would have been a politically pragmatic move, similar to his practice in Babylon, where he used local titles (Anagnostou-Laoutides 2012, 9-10). There are not only Iranian motifs on the coins with the horned horse. Undoubtedly, Seleucus I borrowed the image of the horns from Mesopotamia (Hoover 1996, 28-29; Anagnostou-Laoutides 2012, 3-5; 2017, 155-156; Iossif 2012). The theory that the stele of Naram-Sin, brought to Susa by the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte (who sacked the city of Sippar in the 12th century BC), was the direct inspiration for the introduction of the image of the horned helmet seems to be attractive. P. Iossif (2012) does not exclude the possibility that the famous stele was still present in Susa during the Hellenistic period and hence Seleucus I was most probably familiar with this artefact.

There was no contradiction in referring to both Iranian and Babylonian monarchical traditions. Noteworthy is the fact that the Achaemenids themselves used Babylonian titlature after conquering Babylon, and the Babylonians in turn had a positive attitude towards Persian rule (Boiy 2004, 101, 106-107).⁵ Alexander the Great entered Babylon not as the liberator

⁵ Such an assessment is indicated by the Dynastic Prophecy (BM 40623), the text dated to the beginning of the Seleucid rule in Babylon. According to the text, which describes

from the Persian yoke but as the next Persian King of Kings. Appointing Mazaios, who was a Persian nobleman, as satrap of Babylonia indicates both that Alexander did not distance himself from Achaemenid rule and that the Babylonians did not perceive this rule as an occupation and accepted the Iranian holding such a post (Olbrycht 2004, 22). Seleucus had no reason to distance himself from the Achaemenids. Referring to the forepassed glory of Babylonia that extended at least from the times of Antiochus I until the times of Nebuchadnezzar II⁶ was part of the policy of enlisting local elites. It did not mean that he left aside the period of Persian rule. The great example of merging both traditions is the Cylinder of Antiochus I from Borsippa. At the beginning, the Achaemenid royal title *lugal gal-ú* (the Great King) is inscribed and then follow traditional Babylonian titles *lugal dan-nu lugal šár lugal eki lugal kur.kur* (mighty king, king of the world, king of Babylon, king of lands) (Kosmin 2014a, 181-182).

Two helmets with horns are known from Italy: a type of pilos dating from the 4th to 3rd century BC (Waurick 1988, 151, Abb. 2; Paddock 1993, 388, Fig. 103.6, 104.7, 105.9), and a Samno-Attic helmet (Paddock 1993, 20, Fig. 121.3). This allows for the possibility that Attic helmets with horns existed during the times of Seleucus, such as those on the issues from Susa and Ecbatana, thus explaining the provenance of these depictions. Seleucus might have worn such a helmet modeling himself after Babylonian representations of gods and kings. This could strongly enforce the theory

the Babylonian rulers from Nabopolassar onwards, security in Akkad was maintained in the times of Cyrus the Great (Grayson 1975, 30-37). R. van der Spek (2003, 319-320) suggested a different translation of the text, which changed the its overall character; nonetheless, Spek himself admitted that other Babylonian documents indicate that peace had indeed prevailed in the times of the Persian king. The Persian rule brought prosperity connected with the increase in the size of farmland and population; this included the introduction of settlers, who were part of military colonization, and the emergence of vast dominions that belonged to the king and Persian elites (Kuhrt 1988, 62-63; Joannès 2004, 295-298). The Seleucid rule did not introduce significant changes to the economic system; numerous administrative solutions (Aperghis 2004, 263, 269) as well as the settlement of military colonists were upheld (van der Spek 2004, 307).

⁶ The *Babyloniaca*, written by Berossus and dedicated to Antiochus I, presented Nebuchadnezzar II as a ruler to be emulated. The Cylinder from Borsippa gave the Seleucid king titles of Neo-Babylonian king. Megasthenes, the Seleucus I's ambassador to the court of the Mauryan King Chandragupta, was the first Greek author to write about Nebuchadnezzar II. This might suggest that even Seleucus I made references to this Neo-Babylonian king (Kosmin 2014b, 270-271).

about the identification of the horned horseman with Seleucus. No source, however, mentions that a helmet of this type was worn by a Seleucid king.

Considering the meaning of the motifs of the horned horse, it must be stressed that Seleucus not only used existing templates, but also modified them, imbuing them with new meanings. The tetradrachm minted in Babylon is an excellent example of this. It shows Zeus' head with a laurel wreath on the obverse and Athena with a shield and javelins in a quadriga pulled by four horned elephants on the reverse, while the legend reads: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ (Mørkholm 2001, 71). Here, Zeus is depicted similarly to the god Apollo from Philip II's coins with a biga (Thompson 1982, Fig. 1a). The reverse is also similar, however, Athena replaces the charioteer and horned elephants replace horses, whose likenesses do not have an analogue in Macedonian, Babylonian or Iranian traditions. Zeus' head symbolizes the divine legitimization of Seleucus' power, and horns on the heads of the elephants indicate their divine character and reference Dionysos as the divine conqueror of India, which suggests a military victory linked to the presence of Athena while the animals represent royal rule (Iossif and Lorber 2010, 156-159, 160).

Placing a horned horse on his coins, Seleucus I Nicator combined the Iranian, Babylonian, and Macedonian-Greek traditions. This allowed him to present himself as a rightful king, with divine legitimacy for his rule. In Iran, the king ruled *vašnā Auramazdāha*. The horned horse, and especially the horned helmet, also showed him as a Mesopotamian hero-king or even symbolized his divinity. The coins of Antiochus I Soter (281-261 BC) with the head of Seleucus I in a diadem with bull horns on the obverse and the head of a horned horse on the reverse (Houghton and Lorber 2002, 124, 136-137, 161, cat. no. 322, 363, 469, 470-472; Wright 2010: 117-118, Fig. 66-67) are connected with the first Seleucid king's deification by his son following his death. Seleucus' divine status is attested in the inscription engraved on the Cylinder of Antiochus I from Borsippa, where he is explicitly associated with Marduk (Kosmin 2014a, 181-185). It is possible that Seleucus I strived for his own deification during his lifetime, which could have been expressed by the introduction of the motif of the horned horse, notably the horned rider, on his coins. Seleucus I as the horned rider wielding a spear depicted himself as a victorious commander, which was extremely important in Hellenistic monarchical ideology and strongly connected with the legitimation of kingship. The king's attire, especially the presence of trousers, need to be treated as an express gesture towards

Iranian elites, for whom the cavalry was the elitist force, but most of all, it was traditionally associated with Iran. The horned horse could also have military connotations, emphasizing the role of the cavalry in Seleucus' army and commemorating his victories.

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Pl. 1: 1 – The bronze coin of Seleucus I Nicator from Seleucia on the Tigris. Obverse: the head of a horned horse. Reverse: an anchor, ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ. https://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/seleucia/seleukos_I/SC_145.jpg. With permission of wildwinds.com

Pl. 1: 2 – The silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I Nicator from Ecbatana. Obverse: the head of young Heracles wearing a lion scalp. Reverse: a horned rider on a horned horse, ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ. <https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=138683#>. With permission of www.cngcoins.com

Pl. 1: 3 – The silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I Nicator from Pergamon. Obverse: the head of a horned horse. Reverse: the elephant walking, ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ. https://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/seleucia/seleukos_I/SC_001@1.jpg. With permission of wildwinds.com

Pl. 1: 4 – The silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I Nicator from Susa. Obverse: the head of Seleucus I in an Attic helmet covered with a panther skin and ornamented with a bull horn, and an animal ear. Reverse: the goddess Nike standing while coronating a tropaion, ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ. <https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=138681#>. With permission of www.cngcoins.com

Pl. 1: 5 – The silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy I Soter from Memphis. Obverse: the head of deified Alexander, wearing an elephant scalp headdress, with ram horns. Reverse: Zeus enthroned, holding a sceptre in his left hand and with an eagle on his right hand, called Zeus Aëtophoros, ΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ. http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/egypt/ptolemy_I/Svoronos_024.jpg. With permission of wildwinds.com, ex Gemini IV auction, lot 264

Pl. 1: 6 – The silver tetradrachm of Demetrius Poliorketes from Thebes. Obverse: the Diademed and horned head of Demetrius. Reverse: Poseidon standing with right foot on a rock, holding a trident in his left hand, ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΥ. http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/macedonia/kings/demetrios_poliorketes/Newell_141v.jpg.

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